

## Dark Tourism

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**DARK TOURISM**

**J JOHN LENNON**

## **Abstract**

Dark tourism has passed into the language and study of tourism since first designation in 1996 (see Lennon and Foley, 1996 and Seaton 1996). It is now established as a term to designate those sites and locations of genocide, holocaust, assassination, crime or incarceration that have served to attract visitors. The phenomenon exists across a range of global destinations and demonstrates commonality and unifying elements across a range of societies and political regimes. The interpretation of these sites can of course be the product of ideology, dominant belief systems and they act as the meeting place for history and visitation where questions of authenticity and fact are sometimes juxtaposed with the operation of tourism facilities. What is celebrated, interpreted and developed is often selective and dilemmas of commemoration of the unacceptable and acceptable are reflected clearly in the condition, nature and content of these sites. This selective interpretation is demonstrated in destinations from Cambodia to Lithuania and from Auschwitz to Dallas, from Moscow to London. In these locations, such tourist attractions become key physical sites of commemoration, history and record. They provide the visitor with a narrative which may well be positioned, augmented and structured to engage, entertain or discourage further inquiry.

Dark tourism attractions demonstrate demand but also constitute commemoration, historical reference, narrative legacies and populist heritage attractions. These tourism sites in some cases become one of the few remaining commemorative elements of victims and their testimonies. In such cases the content and its narrative interpretation take on critically important values in understanding a shared past.

## **Keywords**

Dark Tourism, Thanotourism, Genocide, Holocaust, Assassination, Crime, Incarceration, Visitation, Selective Interpretation, Prison Tourism, Commemoration

## **1.0 The Nature and Significance of Dark Tourism**

Dark Tourism (sometimes referred to as Thanatourism) has become established since 1996 as a specialist tourism area of study. Death, suffering, visitation and tourism have been interrelated for many centuries but the phenomena was identified as such and categorised by Lennon and Foley in 1996 and was later the subject of the major defining and now critical source text; *Dark Tourism : the attraction of death and disaster* (Lennon and Foley, 2000). Further, critical contributions to the academic debate in this area by the author of this submission have included issues of interpretation (Lennon, 2001); selective commemoration and interpretation (Lennon 2009; Lennon and Wight 2007; Lennon and Smith 2004). Cross disciplinary and subject area study has also been undertaken in the fields of the sociology of death and death studies (Lennon and Mitchell, 2007) and in the area of criminology and the understanding of crime sites (Botterill and Jones, 2010).

For many years humans have been attracted to sites and events that are associated with death, disaster, suffering, violence and killing. From ancient Rome and Gladiatorial combat to attendance at public executions in London and other major cities of the world death has held an appeal. The site of the first battle in the American Civil War; Manassas, was sold as a potential tourist site the following day (Lennon and Foley 2000) and the viewing of the battlefield of Waterloo by non-combatants was recorded

in 1816 (Seaton, 1999). Sites associated with death and disaster appear to exert a dark fascination for visitors and are frequently linked to crime locations and the perpetration of both lawful and unlawful acts (Lennon, 2010). The sheer diversity of forms of dark tourism sites are significant and have been the subject of research (see for example: Lennon and Foley, 1996, 2000; Seaton 1996; Seaton and Lennon 2004; Dann and Seaton 2001; Ashworth 1996; Sharpley and Stone 2009). The research base in this area of the representation and interpretation of the recent history of death and atrocity has in turn held the attention of academics for some time ( see for example Rojek 1993; Ashworth and Hartman 2005; Seaton 1999, Seaton and Lennon 2004; Sharkley and Stone 2009). Further useful contributions to the area include issues of interpretation and selective commemoration (White and Frew, 2012), cross-disciplinary studies in the field of the sociology of death/death studies (Mitchell, 2007), literature and writing (Skinner, 2012), problematic heritage (Ashworth, 1996, Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1995), the area of criminology/crime sites (Botterill and Jones, 2010) and in the architectural legacy of dark sites (Philpott, 2016).

Tourism and death enjoy a curious relationship. Death and acts of mass killing are a major deterrent for the development of certain destinations and yet such acts can become the primary purpose of visitation in others. In the literature that has emerged since identification and analysis of the phenomena initially occurred (Lennon and Foley 1996a and 1996b; Lennon and Foley 2000) dark tourism crime sites have been identified as pull factors and the relationship between crime and its attraction to visitors been explored by Dalton (2015) who suggests crime related dark sites encourage visitors to adopt memories of death, trauma or suffering. This can occur either at authentic sites or locations where crime is memorialised in some cases for commemorative purposes or education, and in others for crude commercial exploitation. This relationship will be considered later

in this entry and the response of policy makers and governments to issues of commemoration and development will be reviewed. Case analysis will be used to illustrate development and non-development, tourist sites as evidence and policy issues and dilemmas in the context of dark tourism.

## **1.2 From Dark Tourism to Thanatourism**

Since 1996, the terminology associated with the phenomenon has been the subject of discussion. The term 'dark tourism' was created by the author and was given significant coverage in the special edited edition of the International Journal of Heritage Studies (Foley and Lennon 1996 a, 1996 b and 1996 c). In 1993 Rojek had referred to 'Black spots' and 'Fatal Attractions' to highlight sites of fatality which he identified as a feature of post modernism (cf Rojek 1993 p136). This definitional framework was simply too narrow and in the 1996 monograph *Dark Tourism: the attraction of death and disaster*; the author hypothesised that there are aspects of the ancient, modern and post modern to be identified within the spectrum of dark tourism. The phenomena includes:

- Visits to death sites and disaster scenes
- Visits to sites of mass or individual death
- Visits to sites of incarceration
- Visits to representations or simulations associated with death
- Visits to re-enactments and human interpretation of death

Clearly, such categorisation is substantially larger than Rojek's narrow definition. Other terms such as grief tourism [www.griefftourism.com](http://www.griefftourism.com) (accessed 13.09.2010) have also appeared and have served only to increase the lack of clarity of the situation. However, it is the terms; Dark Tourism and Seaton's Thanatourism, that dominate in the literature. Seaton, first used the term in 1996 and hypothesised latter that it offers a more inclusive and balanced term (2009). He contends that the interdisciplinary study of death has been a recurrent historical theme. Notably, 'dark' tourism by contrast also incorporates elements of the ancient, modern and postmodern in its definition. Seaton has reviewed the later work of the author and others (Lennon and Smith 2004, Lennon and Wright 2007, Lennon 2009) on selectivity and has noted that dark tourism is based on an implicit judgment of visitation to and development of such sites as "... transgressive, morally suspect and pathological" (Seaton 2009, p525). Further, it is suggested that 'dark' can be juxtaposed with 'light' tourism which must be, by definition; positive, morally acceptable and normal. Critical here is the language and the use of the word 'dark' as a predominantly pejorative term that intimates that events or locations are negative, transgressive or dubious. Other forms of visitation (which Seaton, 1996, 2009) refers to as 'Thanatourism' have either limited or no sinister connotations. For example; literary pilgrimages to the graves of famous authors or visiting battlefields with family associations.

Interestingly, Eagleton (2010) reaffirmed the enduring human attraction of notions and evidence of evil. However 'evil' is a term of moral approbation and disapproval that suffers from being defined by objective criteria. As Ayer (1973) notes such terms cannot be defined rationally without measurement of 'evil acts' on a human slide rule of moral disgust. The fundamental difficulty of labelling 'evil' and for comparative purposes 'dark' is where the issue of moral approbation of terminology lies.

The interpretation of heritage is the result of complex interactions and pressures between stakeholders and interest groups. This pressure is acute in the case of 'dark' sites or dissonant heritage (cf. Ashworth and Hartmann 2005, Seaton 2001). Indeed, heritage is a contested concept and the pursuit of historical 'accuracy' is invariably compromised by competing ideologies, interpretation, funding etc. As Lowenthal (1998) valuably highlighted defining heritage let alone agreeing a verifiable truth will invariably remain illusive. In tourist attraction sites, visitor centres and those locations explored in this submission such issues are continually confronted. As Seaton (2001) usefully concludes in an analysis of slavery heritage:

“.... Heritage is never a stable, finally completed process but a constantly evolving process of accommodation, adjustment and contestation. This perspective contrasts with that of heritage development as a battle between unproblematic, historical truth and various kinds of bad faith, ranging from commercial to political. It is easy to produce a comic strip Manichaeian view of heritage that conceives it as structured by, on the one hand, wicked tourism exploiters, enforcing suppression or distortion, and contested on the other by dominated or excluded minority victims, trying, with the help of academic voices, to bring truth to light”

(Seaton, 2001, p126)

Commemoration, history and its problematic and contrasting representation in heritage centres and 'dark' site interpretation is the result of complex interactions of contrasting perceptions, ideologies and interests. Dann and Seaton (2001) offer a valuable illustration of such complexities in their critique of the so called 'domination' critique of perceptions of interpretations and operation of slavery as heritage tourism.



Reporting on papers presented at a symposium and entitled; 'Plantations of the Mind' (held in Charleston, USA in 2000), the authors noted a tendency for academic treatment of the subject to reflect a 'domination' critique which suggested slavery interpretation was the product of business and commercial agendas targeted at predominantly white audiences. This simplistic view does not reflect the complex realities of which heritage is interpreted and developed and what histories are overlooked.

The plantation houses of Charleston are cited as examples of historically important architectural monuments which are the subject of preservation and conservation orders. These buildings are the product of the worst excesses of slavery and their maintenance and interpretation has been the subject of significant debate. The alternative is to allow them to decay or indeed to obliterate them as flawed commemoration of slavery. This parallels debates on maintenance of concentration camps (cf Levi, 1986). Obliteration and demolition in such cases has been criticised since it may be seen as a method of disguising and covering the past. This indeed was the intention of the Nazi's in the development of 'temporary' camps which on completion of the final solution would in turn be annihilated like the victims they had incarcerated (Young 1993). Here then the simplistic 'domination' thesis fails. If such dark heritage is not commemorated it may be seen, in whole or part, as some form of complicit suppression of history. Yet, if such sites are interpreted and commemorated then the content and approach may also be seen as compromised or selective in their narratives (cf Dunn and Seaton, 2001, Lennon, 2009).

Dark tourism then is an inclusive term incorporating the extensive and identifiable phenomena of visitation to sites associated with mass killing, extermination and death. The issues of what is interpreted and what is ignored in the heritage of our society is related to ideologies and omissions that result from a complex interaction of commercial potential, political will and social acceptability. Thus the non commemoration of the 'Gypsy'

holocaust and the selectivity evident in holocaust interpretation in some countries merits attention because with tourism visitation it is possible that such sites retain a resonance and provide some commemoration and history of acts of genocide and mass killing. The non-commemoration of the Roma and Sinti genocide is a telling example that alludes to long term racial and ethnic prejudice that has been simply reaffirmed by the absence of commemoration in former sites of concentration camps in the Czech Republic ( for further discussion see Lennon and Smith (2004).

Sharpley and Stone (2009) writing on dark tourism further complicate the context with their sequestration approach which proposes death as a modern taboo that is hidden away and managed by the medical and funeral sectors via professionalised services. This is developed from earlier work on death (notably Aries, 1974, 1981 and 1985) and Gorer (1965) as recognised by Seaton (2009). However, also important in this context is earlier work by Sudnow (1967) and Walter (1996) which has relevance to the sequestration thesis which exhibits inherent contradictions. As Seaton (2009) notes, far from being sequestered, death is very public. Contemporary funeral practice in areas such as the hospice movement contradict the idea of death being professionalised, hidden and separated from contemporary society.

### **1.3 Dark sites and their visitation**

Dark tourism has generated much more than purely academic interest. The term has entered the mainstream and is a popular subject of media attention. More importantly, it is used as a marketing term on sites such as <http://thecabinet.com> wherein the category of dark destinations has been in use since 2006. Indeed, the appeal of a range of global destinations associated with dark acts shows no signs of abatement. Most recently, the

enduring appeal has been reinforced in New York, Paris and beyond. The Ground Zero site within twelve months of 9/11 was attracting significantly greater numbers of visitors than prior to the terrorist attacks (Blair, 2002). In Paris, the death site of Diana, Princess of Wales evidenced pilgrimage and visitation following her death and the site of her burial place; Althorpe achieved significant visitation for the three years immediately following her death. In Africa, sites in Angola, South Africa, Sierra Leon, and Rwanda have all demonstrated the appeal of dark histories to visitors (Rowe, 2007). Academic interest in these phenomena was intimated in the work of Rojek (1993) and Ashworth (1996) and Foley and Lennon (1996) and this has in turn contributes to considerable interest both in academia, main stream and electronic media. The range of dark sites associated with the phenomena is considerable and varies significantly from Holocaust sites (which can incorporate genocide, mass killing, incarceration and experimentation) to the manufactured Merlin Entertainment PLC operations which recreate dramatic tableaux involving costumed interpreters often with very limited historical artefacts and often out with and away from heritage locations. This highly successful company creates 'Dungeon experiences' throughout the UK, which feature crime, punishment, disease and a host of 'dark' elements. However, more broadly, dark tourists can also be found at actual sites, ranging from; grave sites, crash locations, sites of assassination, and at museums of torture and death. Stone (2006) has offered a useful typology of dark sites offering a literal spectrum of death sites and other macabre locations. For many of these sites, elements such as visitor management and conservation, interpretation and marketing, retailing and catering all create issues and challenges. From a management and operations perspective issues of; ethical presentation, visitor behaviour, site management, revenue generation, marketing and promotion, all create areas that are fraught with difficulties and are frequently the subject of criticism and debate.

Dark tourism has been in existence as an element of tourism for many centuries (Foley and Lennon 1996; Seaton 1996). Murder, execution and sites of lawful and unlawful death have served to attract the attention of visitors and residents from ancient times to the current day. Education and the nature of the learning experience are frequently used to justify and explain motivation for development and visitation in the modern world. Indeed, the idea of travel as an educative experience of new and previously unvisited destinations is frequently used as a rational argument, associated with discussions of modernity. More recently it is the significance of communications technology, reporting and real time communication that serves to heighten awareness about 'dark' destinations that may be visited.

The demand for dark tourism has received growing attention as a result of media interest and filmic reproduction (that has becoming increasingly graphic and pictorial) as well as narrative reportage. Awareness is a function of the all-pervasive current media; the real time reportage and the massive expansion of visual records available in electronic form make data available and help to heighten awareness.

The work of Urry (1990) has validity here in his work on the contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Dark sites represent an examination of the extraordinary, literally the "..... difference between one's normal place of residence/work and the object of the tourist gaze." (Urry 1990 p12). The case studies examined in this submission will illustrate increasingly how such visitation has become less exotic and unusual and a commoditised element of our contemporary social lives in many societies. Such visitation is, like mass tourism, an everyday cultural practice and a part of contemporary life. A useful critique of dark tourism is offered by Bowman and Pezzilo (2009) who interrogate the trope of 'dark' and use performance studies to consider the interface of tourism and death. The

authors consider the role of ritual, embodiment and play at a range of sites they consider to review assumptions made in identifying sites as dark.

#### **1.4 The Case Study Approach**

This examples used to illustrate the phenomena catalogue some of the research on sites undertaken by the author between 1996 and 2016. The primary research method utilised in each location has incorporated review of sites and interview analysis with curators, museum and attraction operators, policy makers and local authority representatives across a range of international locations. Secondary source material ranges from; historical documents to media representation, visitor and tourism statistics. The bibliographical references included at the end of this submission evidencing the range and breath of sources which may be of value and interest to future researchers. It is important to note that in order to understand and delineate the phenomena the research has incorporated writing and research in the fields of: history, film studies, photography and sociology in order to build a wider inclusive perspective and understand sites and their often 'troubled' histories.

The first case analysis of a range of dark crime sites considers how moral ambiguities and media attention have continually served to place visitation to sites of criminal activity in an analogous context to dark tourism sites. Invariably murder, tragedy and violence catalyse the most significant visitation and local authorities and civil administrations continue to deal with such sites in often irrational and frequently arbitrary ways. The second case study examines the tragic past of Cambodia under the period of Khmer Rouge domination (1975-78). Here conflicting political agendas are illustrated against then on-going trial of former Khmer Rouge leaders and with reference to local communities who lived through this period. In such

a context, the past is not independent or immutable. In this case (and in many such contexts) it is endlessly reviewed and edited.

From the outset across both cases , the value of a multidisciplinary approach using academic disciplines is adopted . Such disciplines represent the primary instruments and methodologies for analysis of our contemporary society. Tribe (2009) suggests that research in tourism cannot be regarded as disciplinary based because:

1. Concepts used in such research e.g. motivation and impacts are not interrelated but are borrowed and applied to the tourism context.
2. Concepts do not form a distinctive network that processes a logical structure. They tend to be understood within their contributory disciplines.
3. There is no epistemological perspective adopted for tourism research. Indeed, perspectives from contributory disciplines are generally used.
4. Concepts in tourism research can be traced to their source disciplines.

Indeed, support for Tribe's (1997) argument for the non-disciplinary status of tourism research, has been accepted within tourism analysis (Meethan, 2001). Consequently, the implications for the work undertaken by the author suggest precedent and validation of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. Reflecting on the different ways of theorising tourism discussed above, the prevalent approach initiated by MacCannell (1999) is derived from the consequence of the differentiation inherent in modernity. As a result of living in an alienated modern life, the tourist is in search of authentic experiences, perceptions and insights to reconstruct cultural heritage or social identity (MacCannell, 1999).

Case studies are valuable, illustrative methodologies and according to Yin's definition, 'a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003, p13). This definition meets the requirements of the research aims identified for work on dark tourism and has formed the basis for much of the commentary to date. As Stake intimates, a 'case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied' (op cit 1995, p236). Thus, different cases may be studied for various purposes. For this work, the case(s) were chosen because they could provide an opportunity to explore how the phenomenon of interest (visiting dark tourism sites) exists within its particular settings and has implications for ideology, policy and historical record.

There are a number of different ways to categorise case studies, which can be used as useful tools to develop an effective understanding of visitation and development of tourism 'dark' sites. According to Stake, the case is 'a functioning specific' and 'integrated system', which is characterised by the boundedness and the behaviour patterns of the system (Stake, 1998, p236-237). As indicated before, the phenomenon and its context are integral elements of this work. Thus, what is central to defining the case is to satisfactorily identify both the phenomenon and its context. The phenomena is the visitation to dark tourism sites, their development and interpretation. The context being their locations within a range of contrasting economic, social and cultural environments.

### **1.5 Case Analysis :Crime, Selectivity and Dark Appeal**

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It is clear that for many of the sites identified by authors working in the field of Dark Tourism have a relationship with crime and the results of criminal behaviour. Famous assassination sites, such as; the Dallas Book Depository building, Dallas, Texas constitute established tourism destinations (Lennon and Foley, 2000), that are synonymous with illegal acts. The holocaust sites of Poland, Germany and elsewhere (Ashworth 1996, Beech 2000) are all inherently linked to the illegal genocide perpetrated by the Nazi regime during the Second World War. Indeed, since September 11, 2001 the significant appeal of the former site of the world trade centre, the memorial to the victims and the museum in New York have reinforced this area as an essential element of the New York tourist itinerary. This destination has thus become a commoditised element of the New York visitor package. It has become a part of the tourist itinerary and is celebrated in souvenir merchandise and imagery at the site and throughout New York and beyond.

The appeal of such sites is less to do with the perpetration of an illegal or criminal act but rather a fascination visitors appear to possess with evil and the acts of evil that humans can perpetrate. Whether this is a war crime or a murder, a site of mass killing or an assassination site the appeal remains significant. Such attractions also cover sites of 'lawful' killing. The crime and its consequences provide a framework for an act (whether legal or illegal) which in some cases will exert a draw for visitors.

Clearly then, death, torture and incarceration can be demonstrated to have such appeal. However, lesser crimes and their consequences fail to exert such 'pull' on tourists. Minor crimes, sites of theft, fraud provide limited potential for viewing or visitation and simply fail to attract. The house of the serial killers; Fred and Rosemary West, became a focus for visitation



following the period of killing they undertook between 1971-1987. Morbid visitation recorded to their home at 25, Cromwell Street, Gloucester, UK; was clearly connected to the illegal acts of abduction, torture, and murder that were conducted by these perpetrators at this location. Internationally, visitors to sites of incarceration such as Robben Island in South Africa are not only considering the heritage of the apartheid era but also viewing the evidence of imprisonment of the victims of unjust laws of the former regime (for useful discussions see Shearing and Kempa, 2004). Similarly, Police Museums that exhibit items of evidence used in criminal trials also appear to exert a dark fascination for visitors. This area was the subject of a valuable issue of *Radical History Review* featuring insightful reviews relating to a range of Police museums (Chazel, 2012). Indeed, the celebrated London Waxworks; Madame Tussauds, has continued to draw more visitors to its galleries of criminals and murderers than any other element of the experience (Spedding, 2001).

It is apparent that abduction, murder and killing also appear to exert a strong pull for visitors. The town of Soham in Cambridgeshire came to public attention in 2001 as the site of the kidnapping of Holly Chapman and Jessica Wells. This event attracted many casual visitors keen to view the location of their disappearance (Seaton and Lennon, 2004). It followed and reaffirmed the attraction of locations such as the Dunblane Massacre (1996) and the Lockerbie air disaster (1988) as sites of tragic and criminal events that have served to attract tourists and visitors by car, coach and on foot (Lennon and Foley 2000). In the case of Soham some had come to sign books of condolences, leave flowers or children's toys at the site. Others had come to simply observe this ordinary small town in the turmoil following the abduction and murder of these two infants. Indeed, there was reportage of coach tour buses being rerouted to cover this town as part of their travel itinerary (O'Neil 2002). Echoes of similar dark homage paid to the West's home; 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester can also be identified

and have relevance in this context. Following the suicide of her husband whilst in Police custody, Rosemary West was given ten life sentences at Winchester Crown Court in November 1995 (Smith, 1995). However the house where so many of the crimes were perpetrated had become a tourist site. As the busy traffic of Police, Forensic specialists and photographers faded following the trial and conviction of the murderous pair they were replaced by visitors to the site where most of the victims were slaughtered and buried. As a consequence, local policy makers and administrators faced a dilemma of what to do with the house and whether or not to rename the street. Consultation with residents took place and the impact on property prices of those houses and flats in close proximity to Cromwell Street was cited as a major concern (Varley, 1995). The house was eventually demolished and the debris was buried some 25 meters underground to prevent souvenir hunters from pillaging the site. Unsurprisingly, the street was eventually renamed and the areas appeal has reduced. Such an approach is not new and it reflects how local authorities and policy makers struggle with such sites. In Dallas, the Book Depository Building lay vacant for many years and the lobby for demolition was very strong before a local conservation society eventually succeeded in developing the building to commemorate the life of the President; John F Kennedy (see Lennon and Foley 2000 for further discussion). In the UK, the disguise of another address associated with notorious crimes was evident at the home of John Christie; 10 Rillington Place. This location underwent a name change after the execution of its owner in 1953. Christie, who confessed to the killing of four women including his wife, brought an infamy to the area that local residents and local authorities were keen to erase. Rillington Place became Rushton Mews before being later redeveloped and called Wesley Square (Varley, 1995).

This issue of social and political acceptable and unacceptable commemoration reoccurred with the home of Josef Fritzl of Amstetten,

Austria. This was the dwelling place where Fritzl imprisoned and raped his daughter over a period of twenty four years in a basement / cellar area. Following his imprisonment in 2008, the house had remained a sealed crime scene, guarded by Police. Despite this, the town of Amstetten has seen an influx of visitors keen to view the location where Austria's most notorious recent criminal had lived. This sprawling 66 room property with its 450 sq ft basement / cellar area (wherein Fritzl's daughter was held) has continued to present development dilemmas for the local authority, casting a long shadow on the town. As the Mayor of Amstetten ; Herbert Katzensgruber noted:

“A dark chapter of our town's history has finally been closed. The people of Amstetten now want to be left in peace.” (Rayner and Gammell, 2009 p3)

The basement cellar was filled with concrete in 2015 and the house which had failed to sell gained further notoriety as it now finds use as a refuge for asylum seekers (Hall 2015). The belief that the town's association with this notorious criminal has to be seen as a closed chapter is essentially the driver of policy in this area. The actions and comments of the authorities reveals a real fear of stigmatisation of the location, loss of civic reputation, reduced appeal of the destination for investment etc. if it remains associated with this dark chapter of its history. Whether in the UK or Austria similar concerns have been recorded and can be highlighted. Indeed, the situation in Amstetten echoes concerns expressed some three years earlier in 2006 in a similar case of kidnap, rape, imprisonment and coercion, also in Austria. Natascha Kampusch, an Austrian teenager was kidnapped and imprisoned in a cellar in Strasshof, near Vienna from 1998 until her escape in 2006. Her kidnapper; Wolfgang Priklopil, had his house seized by the local authority who were determined it should not become a dark attraction. Indeed, the house was later sold to the victim; Natascha

Kampusch, for a nominal fee who also expressed concern about its potential appeal. As Kampusch commented in relation to the house:

“I don’t need it, I don’t particularly want it but I don’t want anybody trying to turn it into some kind of sick museum.”

(Op cit p4)

Such cities, towns, streets and building are defined by their tragic history. An iconic example is provided by the town of Dachau which lives in the shadow of its terrible past. It is known for its association with the Nazi regime and as the location of the former concentration camp. In the recent past town officials have attempted to market Dachau’s other, more forgiving, cultural and historic features ( see tourist authority promotion material from the 2011-12 marketing campaign below) .

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**Concentration Camp Memorial Site**

The [Concentration Camp Memorial Site](#) makes Dachau Europe's central place of learning and remembrance. More than 600.000 people from all over the world come here each year to learn from the lessons of contemporary history.



**Old Town and Castle**

Blessed with a highly regarded arts and [cultural scene](#), the former [artists' colony](#) with over 1200 years of history boasts a variety of [sights and points of interest](#). Nameless cultural events make Dachau a popular hub north of Munich. It is also the ideal starting point from which to discover the region's charming countryside.



**Cultural Events**

Thanks to an impressive program of [cultural events](#) ranging from the Dachau [Palace Concerts](#) to the [Dachau Music Summer](#) and the traditional [Dachau Country Fair](#) - Dachau is definitely worth a visit all year round.

**Figure 1 Dachau attractions** (Stadt Dachau, 2011)

However, visitor numbers for Dachau's other sites have been a fraction of those to the memorial site / concentration camp. This clearly suggests that tourist motivation to visit Dachau is predominantly because of the concentration camp and destinations with such infamous 'dark' history and pejorative place names have limited ability to redevelop appeal for visitation ( see Lennon and Weber, 2016 for further discussion). Dachau's complex identity as a tourist destination remains as the location of an infamous concentration camp making it almost impossible to successfully market any 'other Dachau' brand or destination. This is

overwhelming proven by visitor numbers to the concentration camp when compared with visitation to destinations such as Dachau Old Town. The latter does have a heritage which predates World War Two and its previous identity as a centre for arts and culture is not in doubt. Yet, the impacts of the Nazi holocaust on the external perception of Dachau remain deep rooted following the end of the war and the liberation of the Camp. Dachau like many crime and dark tourism sites lives in the shadow of its irrefutable past. Crime sites that have dark associations will also influence reputation and perceptions. Indeed, until governments and policymakers are comfortable in dealing with the nature and content of such sites, their histories and the attraction and appeal of such locations of crime, then we will continue to see such dark sites dealt with in an arbitrary and at times irrational way. These sites represent; the record, the context and in some cases the evidence of crime. Their conservation, educational potential and appeal merits deeper consideration and in some cases their victims deserve a voice.

## 1.6 Case Analysis : Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge : evidence and imagery

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The growth in tourism to Cambodia has created many challenges in the context of a developing country. The landscape is rich in natural and built heritage and the outstanding Temple complex of Angkor Wat is now complemented by a range of other activities and attractions throughout the country. Yet, this is a country that is still healing from a protracted period of war and an internal regime that perpetrated some of the most extreme and barbaric policies of rule ever seen in this part of Asia or indeed the world. The period of Khmer Rouge domination 1975-79 saw evacuation of cities, extermination and starvation, closure of international borders and incredible hardship perpetrated on its people. The commemoration and interpretation of this period is very important in the context of understanding modern Cambodia and its recent tragically dark past. Yet, the heritage and documentation of this time is under threat in a rapidly developing economy where the significance of the dark past is at best not a development priority and at worst deliberately avoided.

In terms of examining tourism and the relationship to the period of Khmer Rouge rule (1975-79) one of the key national visitor attractions located in Phnom Penh will be considered, namely; Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Tuol Sleng was a former secondary school that's use was changed in 1976 by the Khmer Rouge. It became a prison (known as S-21) to detain and torture individuals accused of opposing the regime (Chhang and Kosal 2005). Under the control of the Khmer Rouge all of the classrooms of this former school building were converted into prison cells with windows enclosed by iron bars and barbed wire. Small cells for single prisoners were created on the ground floor and larger mass prison cells were created on the upper floors. The prisoners and victims of the S-21 facility Tuol

Sleng were estimated at 10,499 to which should be added over 2000 children who were also killed here (Chhang and Kosal 2005). Other authors suggest that detailed review of documentation held at S-21 indicate closer to 20,000 executions (Dunlop 2005; Chandler 1999). However, what is beyond doubt is that the regime and the nature of incarceration were brutal and the shackles and torture instruments used by the guards are still currently exhibited in the museum. This site is important because after its capture by the invading North Vietnamese army the site was found to contain detailed documentary and photographic evidence that proved, beyond reasonable doubt, that within Democratic Kampuchea there was; widespread and systematic torture, extra-judicial execution, specific programmes of genocide against religious and ethnic groups, as well as the partial decimation of the people of Cambodia (Hawk 1989).

Since its inception in 1979, as a museum it has faced continual financial crisis, bereft of government funding and not permitted to generate its own revenues. The government justification for this policy is related to ensuring free access to the museum for Cambodian nationals. According to the Museum Director and Deputy Director (both interviewed by the author as part of research for the subject area ) this was nothing more than a strategy to starve the museum of funds and prevent conservation efforts.

In terms of content, the museum is minimalist in content and approach with very limited narrative, orientation or explanation. The first six cells the visitors encounter feature a resurrection like simplistic display of materials and photographs which seek to recapture the state the invading North Vietnamese army soldiers found on entering S-21 in 1979. Indeed, the final victims of the Khmer Rouge were left shackled to their beds following torture and murder. These same beds, shackles and latrine cans are left in an approximate location that mirrors photographs of each cell taken by the victorious soldiers of the North Vietnamese. These photos are hauntingly



displayed in each of the rooms where the tableau of artefacts mirrors the photographic content. This is a process that can be located in a range of heritage sites (not least in parts of Auschwitz Birkenau Concentration Camps in Poland ) and is described as photographic 'resurrection' by Barthes (1981). Through imagery and photographic record the past is brought into the present by the echo of image. Simultaneously, the space of time is collapsed and what Levi (1990) described as 'the other place' (where atrocity and mass murder on an unimaginable scale was perpetrated) is brought into the present. This is done by reference to objects, landscapes, built heritage and people recorded and viewed. However, since 1979 the narrative of the site has remained incomplete and the historical and documentary evidence is decaying. Primary objects and evidence of genocide are in danger of loss and there is very little assistance from central government or national heritage agencies to prevent such decay.

Dark tourism attractions such as S-21 provide the record of the past. The acceptance of deterioration of primary objects and documentary evidence and the nature such minimal investment in interpretation can be viewed as political acts. The non-interpretation of history, its partial obliteration or simply focusing public expenditure in other directions all constitutes actions that are fuelled by a dominant ideology resistant to illuminating a dark past. In such an incomplete context the tourist has to attempt to decode the extent to which partial interpretation, limited conservation and selectivity combine to veil history. Habermas (1970) has successfully theorised on the impossibility of non-ideological interpretation and it is accepted that neutrality and accuracy will remain elusive concepts from a curatorial and interpretive standpoint. However, when such narrative is absent, genocide ignored and primary evidence placed at peril of loss the nature of the risk of such selective interpretation becomes much more apparent.

As intimated earlier, Tuol Sleng, as a museum, has its origins in the North Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia that followed the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979. Indeed, the interpretation has its origins in a North Vietnamese political and ideological demonstration of Khmer Rouge aggression and genocide which constituted the dominant perspective in the initial (and much of the current) interpretation. It was the work of an occupying power whose interpretation of the Khmer Rouge invariably was selective and partial, centering on outcomes rather than causes. It is a museum of perpetrators and victims that does not attempt to disengage and explain the complex political and social context of the period. In 1980, following liberation (or invasion) by the North Vietnamese this prison was reorganised and content reviewed as 'The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crime.'

In the absence of 'explanation', piles of prisoner's clothes and instruments of torture are displayed and the security and identification photographs taken by the Khmer Rouge of the incarcerated are displayed in alarming quantities with almost non-existent narrative accompaniment. The building is now deteriorating and the other exhibits of: furniture, Khmer Rouge photographs of victims and indeed the records of 'crimes' and extracted 'confessions' are all at risk of serious deterioration (Hughes 2003, Lennon 2009). Investment by the government of Cambodia in this facility has been promised but not delivered as this site of death continues to decay.

In Tuol Sleng the photographs of the Khmer Rouge victims are a central part of the visual experience of visiting. They provide the imagery and evidence of the crimes of this regime against its people. Sontag (1977) argued that to collect photographs was to collect the world. In such dark sites, images are connected with emotions of fascination and horror and they are in turn frequently recorded and photographed by tourists. The

sites we view and the photographs of the past that we view (whether at concentration camps, sites of genocide, execution or incarceration) are inherently enmeshed in complex relationships with texts, histories and imagery. Interpretation is complicated by the limitations of language which when measured against visual imagery is often inadequate. Words have no fixed value and cannot claim single meanings. The multiplicity of possible meanings in interpretation is a concern in any attempt at 'understanding' dark episodes. Derrida's (1977) *deconstruction* thesis is useful to this discussion and in delineating visual and written interpretation (for further discussion see Lennon, 2016). *Deconstruction* was primarily applied to written texts however it can be applied to visual imagery. *Deconstruction* seeks to uncover literal and philosophical ways of thinking about text and visual imagery. Decoding 'literal' content in dark sites in order to understand their contexts and expose the dominant ways of thinking about; the tragic, the pain and capacities of humans to do evil has resonance here. As discussed, interpretation can of course be inherently ideological and Imagery can also occupy similar levels of ambiguity and complexity. In the case of the horror of something like the genocide of the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), it is the impossibility of reconciling the reality and unreality of such enormous evil that is so difficult to comprehend. This so titled 'undecidability' is central to Derrida's reflection, when it is applied to reveal paradoxes and dichotomies in what we see, what we understand and what we perceive. As indicated previously the S-21 site uses imagery of executed prisoners which reflects the Khmer Rouge obsessive record keeping of all of those executed. As the only interpretive format at the site it will often catalyse strong emotional reactions amongst visitors.



Images of Prisoners executed by the Khmer Rouge, S-21 Site, Phnom Phenn, Cambodia (Picture J J Lennon)

Particularly poignant is the photograph of the female detailed below. It is more harrowing because of the presence of the child that this woman is holding. The photograph is unusual as the majority of images displayed consist of prisoners pictured alone, providing a degree of uniformity. Consequently, this particular image is uniquely tragic and in turn frequently photographed by visitors.



Image of Prisoner and child executed by the Khmer Rouge, S-21 Site, Phnom Phenn, Cambodia (Picture J J Lennon)

Yet, in looking at this and the other photographs, the tourist gazes at a visual record of the past that is incomplete. The name of the young mother pictured is Chan Kim Sun and she was the wife of a senior Khmer Rouge official located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Dunlop, 2005). What is not immediately apparent in the context of such limited interpretation is the critical role of Tuol Sleng as a prison, torture and execution place for traitors and enemies within the Khmer Rouge. The majority of those pictured in these final portraits, were in fact predominantly prisoners from the cadre ranks of the Khmer Rouge. These were the interrogators, guards and officials possibly from the prison itself. As the regime collapsed and

purges of 'traitors' became constant many former Khmer Rouge cadre were incarcerated in the strange inversion that was Tuol Sleng. This woman was a part of the incarceration and execution machinery of the Khmer Rouge. The ambiguity in emotional response between guilt and innocence is heightened when the image is deconstructed and understood more fully. To consider such images is to directly confront issues of observation, visitation and record but are also indicative of our curious relationship with crime and death. Does a collection of similar images viewed across interpretive displays catalyse sympathy or does repetition blur and dilute our response? Overexposure to the 'spectacle' induces Debord's (1970) drugged passivity in a society weary of spectacle. Our current society overwhelmed by digital and social media has created tourists equipped with telephone based cameras and has served simply to heighten the commonality of spectacle. These images have further normalized the horror of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Incarceration, spectatorship of penal locations and visitation of former prison sites has spawned a literature in criminologically related dark tourism, see for example Barton and Brown (2015), Dalton (2015) and elch (2015). These authors consider various aspects of our relationship with punishment and the instruments of incarceration. The fascination it exerts across a range of media is considered:

"Citizens may participate vicariously in mediated worlds where pain is inflicted across television, films, recreation and news. They may be disturbed by these images. They may find such engagement titillating. In any case they are enthralled in a manner that is not easily conducive to analysis or self-reflection."

(Brown, 2009 p5)

The area of representation of incarceration in theatre, films and television as well as in enactment at dark ssites has also been the subject of

valuable consideration in the context of Canada (Walby and Piche, 2015). In this case the role of staged authenticity is considered as a further way that suffering and the infliction of pain is normalised. Prison tourism has received international attention in locations ranging from the USA to Australia, South Africa and the UK. There have been valuable insights offered by criminologists (see Schept, 2015; Hodgkinson and Urquhart 2016 and Wilson 2008).

### **1.7 Conclusion : Tourists, Interpretation and Dark Sites**

As can be seen from the preceding discussion and the academic research cited tourist's attraction to dark sites is neither new nor culturally straightforward. Such sites whilst critical to historical record have become part of the 'tourist gaze', visually choreographed, composed and framed for consumption (Urry, 1990). The visitor's fascination with recorded imagery for upload and digital distribution is juxtaposed with the aspects of everyday life. In Facebook and Instagram, photos of genocide sites and crime locations share space with pictures of celebrities, pets, birthdays and family. In this way we combine codes, simultaneously celebrating the 'depthlessness' of popular culture and visitor appeal with the irreconcilable horror of such sites (Featherstone, 2007) .

Interpretation and its development or non-development, is central to the case analysis and previous publications discussed Interpretation is the primary means by which museums and heritage sites communicate with visitors and it is through interpretation that memory and audience engagement becomes selective. As Ham and Krumpal (1996, p.2) argue:

Interpretation, by necessity, is tailored to a non captive audience – that is, an audience that freely chooses to attend or ignore communication content without fear of punishment, or forfeiture of reward... Audiences of interpretative programmes... freely choose whether to attend and are free to decide not only how long they will pay attention to communication content but also their level of involvement with it.

Interactivity and innovative exhibitory techniques are central to the 'entertainment' experience within the museum environment and can bring the visitor closer to the context, however spurious the authenticity of such experiences may be. Interpretation, in this sense, is the sum and substance of commemoration and can have various impacts on audiences, often based on the political or cultural agendas of host destinations and managers. As Hollinshead (1999) argues, tourism is a means of production whereby the themes and sites viewed are cleverly constructed narratives of past events which can manipulate tourists to become involved in configurations of political power.

The case studies explored introduce evidence of such conflicting political and cultural agendas in the context of numerous locations. The management of interpretation and memorial is analysed with implications for future collective acceptance of the 'dark' past projected through the museum and attraction environment. These explanatory case studies present key issues which are unique to each site, specifically their roles in commemoration through themes, interpretation, narrative and events. Through analysis of these sites a process of 'selective interpretation' (Domic, 2000; Rowehl, 2003) emerges in some cases. Such narrative sometimes referred to as 'hot interpretation' (Uzzell, 1989), has been defined as the process of creating multiple constructions of the past (Schouten, 1995) whereby history is never an objective recall of the past,



but is rather a selective interpretation, based on the way in which we view ourselves in the present.

Dark tourism sites present significant evidence of selective interpretation and illustrate issues of cultural consumption and heritage commodification. This in turn gives rise to societal implications including the exclusion of minority groups (for example, the omission of the Roma and Sinti holocaust in terms of primary remembrance sites) and problems with the ethics of 'selling' the past (Domic, 2000). The 'dark' heritage landscape that exists in many sites is dominated by moral complexities surrounding the commemoration of many nations' and peoples' tragic past. The content at such sites is often little more than a disproportionate slant on the past which offers the majority of the visiting public a chance to share in a nation's often positive historical interpretation of its past. Quality interpretation consists of much more than just higher visitor numbers (Rowehl, 2003) but also produces a degree of satisfaction and enlightenment that can accompany a genuine learning experience. It is only through addressing these ethical dichotomies and dealing with selectivity in historical narrative, that such an approach to dark tourism sites can begin to emerge. It is hoped that this will replace many nations; leaders, policymakers and museum curators trepidation and reluctance to engage with their collective and unacceptable past.

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